

Address by Hon (Mrs) L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun
Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education
and Scientific Research
Reception for HSC Laureates
Monday 17 July 2017

Good morning,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this traditional event organized by my Ministry to honour our Laureates of the HSC 2016 batch.

Right at the outset, congratulations are in order for you, laureates, but also for your parents, teachers and Rectors who have been instrumental in your success. This achievement has become a reality through sheer dint of your collective and collaborative hard work and unstinted dedication.

I am therefore very happy to be in your midst to recognize and celebrate your accomplishment.

Dear Laureates,

We are set to celebrate 50 years of our independence next year. I believe that we can legitimately uphold and take pride in the fact that much of the success of our country and of the solid repute it has earned internationally can be placed at the doorstep of advances made in Education.

Indeed, this feat has largely been the result of an education story woven together by generations of teachers and students. Your predecessors have enabled the country to take an upward socio-economic trajectory. As we embark on the next 50 years of national evolution, it is my belief that it is the bright minds that you are who will continue to play a critical role in further defining the new contours of our national destiny.

You know that it has been traditionally said that Mauritius has no other resources apart from its human resource.

Well, this platitude is not entirely true.

The fact is that there *are* a lot of natural resources but they have so far not been fully tapped.

On the other hand, what is true is that we need the human capability, the intellectual capital to come forward with innovative and progressive ways to tap and exploit these resources.

Laureates, this is why, for a long time to come, our major asset will continue to remain our people.

In that, we are no different from other countries.

Indeed, you tend to hear the same story globally: nations will rise or fall in importance and in fortune based on the quality of their human capital.

The human factor will thus be decisive in shaping the future of our nation.

This is the context in which, as Minister of Education, I have made mine the mission to spare no efforts in developing our human capital.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education is a dynamic sector. Because it is at the heart of development, because it drives change and innovation, it has itself to be in a constant state of flux.

I am sure that you have all felt the momentum of education reforms currently under way,

We want to ensure that all our learners at all levels show excellence in all domains-- and not simply the academic one, important as this is.

We want all of them to grow into responsible citizens of tomorrow.

Accordingly, the reforms, starting right from the earliest stages of education, have as aim to transform learners' competencies and attitudes.

You are all aware that survival in the 21st century is highly dependent upon the ability to be creative as well as innovative in the way we transform the world around us.

True, we cannot figure out what the future holds for us; it has been said that we cannot predict the future.

But the fact is that we can predict the future by *creating* the future.

It is time therefore that our schools start to rethink their mission.

Schools have to nurture qualities and skills like communication, problem-solving skills, collaborative work, etc., as part of a skills kit for their students.

As you embark on higher education, my dear Laureates, you will realise how significant these skills and competencies are.

Of course, ladies and gentlemen, this does not mean that our education system should forget the central tenets of equity, equality, justice and fairness.

Rather, we have to continue to uphold affirmative actions through support to both the meritorious and those with social needs.

As you are aware, my Ministry has now been given the means to do precisely that.

I know that, for some time now, there had been complaints registered about the allowance issue for Laureates, what with high costs of living and studies and so forth.

As of this present financial year, scholarship winners can now breathe more freely.

The PM and Ministry of Finance, as you know, has put in additional financial efforts and increased the allowances for the Laureates as from this present financial year.

I know this will be of help to you. I leave it now to you to seize the opportunity to excel even more in your professional development so that, one day, you return to contribute in this country with your expertise and the know-how that you will have acquired.

Dear laureates, There are two more features I would want you to pay attention to and reflect upon.

One, it is extremely important that you carefully exercise your choice and selection of career.

You would be well-inspired to choose to pursue your studies in fields that will have an impact on your future employability. This will bring a lot of personal benefits to you, naturally.

But, in addition, by driving competitiveness, innovation and productivity, you will also help Mauritius sustain its competitive advantages.

Accordingly, see to it that these fields of study you opt for provide you with the right mix and blend of knowledge and work experience.

Two, I notice that, since some time now, some laureates are gradually coming to be interested in studying in the local higher education institutions.

This is a positive sign-- although I can also understand the appeal, the attraction that studying overseas carries for many of you.

You should nonetheless start to note the transformations we are bringing about in positioning our institutions as strategic providers of tertiary education.

Infrastructural development is on the cards.

Research is being massively encouraged and, as significantly, in our endeavor to transform Mauritius into an Education Hub, our Higher Education Institutions are engaged in marketing campaigns for the recruitment of international students.

Already, we are witnessing a positive response of the internationalization process, with a number of international students seeing Mauritius as an attractive HE destination.

That is something you should reflect upon, and encourage your younger peers to consider, especially now that Mauritius is placing a consistent emphasis on industry-focused managerial, technical and vocational skills.

Other institutions that are tipped to be centres of attraction are the Polytechnics. We are already working collaboratively with international partners to produce in these Institutions rigorous programmes having a strong focus on skills acquisition. We are talking here of both generic thinking skills as well as specialized technical skills.

Frankly, I wouldn't be surprised to see some Laureates seeking admission in Polytechnics sometime in the future.

Dear laureates,

You are on the threshold of a wonderful new adventure, one that starts necessarily with stepping through the doors of higher learning. I know that some of you have set your sights on overseas institutions while others are opting for higher education institutions in Mauritius.

No matter where your choice lies, remember your performance should be nothing short of stellar. I look forward to meeting you in some years' time, brimming with pride for being innovative, committed and trail-blazers.

Let me end on this note, congratulating you once again upon your success at the Higher School Certificate Examinations of 2016.

I look forward to your creating opportunities to serve your country and the world to the best of your ability with excellence, honesty and integrity.

I wish you all the best in your future studies, and in your life.

And remember always the words of the American Philosopher and Psychologist, William James:

‘The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it’

Bon chance à vous tous!